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## DPI VISTA Monthly

### Inside this issue:

<b>Birthdays</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>VISTAs in the News</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recipe of the Month</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Hey, that's a good idea!</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>VISTA to VISTA</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>Grant Opportunities</b>	<b>6</b>

### Save the Dates!

**February 17:**

VISTA Supervisor Check-in

**February 26:**

VISTA Monthly Check-in



## Healing Homework Headaches: An Action Team Approach

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

"Awkward!" teens like to shout out when a topic becomes too sensitive to discuss. It means, "Stop the conversation! Hold it right there because I'm too embarrassed/unwilling/confused to continue."

For families and schools, homework may fall in the "Awkward!" category. Often it's as difficult for parents to admit that their child doesn't regularly complete or do well on homework as it is for teachers to admit that numerous children in their classroom face the same difficulty. Fortunately, Partnership Action Teams can be wonderful places to air concerns and discover options and solutions.

Here are some ideas for how a VISTA-facilitated Partnership Action Team might structure an exploration into the murky waters of making homework fair, do-able, and learning-oriented for children of all families.

### Step 1: Gather homework facts.

What's the school or district policy on homework? What are homework completion rates by classroom, grade, and/or subject? Who's not getting the homework done and why not? What do parents think about the quantity and quality of homework? "Homework Lady" Cathy Vatterott,

([www.homeworklady.com](http://www.homeworklady.com))

Associate Professor of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, says that school groups consider if homework policy is fair to all

groups of students. Children from poor or non-English-speaking families failing at homework may not have the supplies, home environment, or parental understanding to monitor and help. What can the school do to ameliorate those differences?

### Step 2: Set homework guidelines.

What's the purpose of homework? Does it cultivate learning or resentment? What constitutes "good" homework versus "busy" homework, and when does homework become too much? Vatterott says that homework should:

- never be used for new learning and should not require children to ask parents for help.
- not interfere with a student's ability to sleep, play, or relax.
- offer students choices based on their interests, learning styles, and ability to learn.
- generally follow the 10-minute per grade rule. For example, sixth graders do no more than 60 minutes of homework for all subjects combined.

### Step 3: Guide parents in their role.

What should parents be encouraged to do? How should parents help their child? Where can parents go when they have concerns, cannot furnish homework supplies, or don't understand the homework process? The National PTA

([www.pta.org/2039.htm](http://www.pta.org/2039.htm))

maintains that it's important for schools to set guidelines and not "expectations" for parents. Responsibility for completing homework should flow from the teacher to the child, with the parent's support, and not from the teacher to the parent.

### Step 4: Encourage lots of parent-teacher communication.

Do parents know the school's policies on grading and late homework? Do parents know when children can complete homework during, before or after school? How can parents encourage children to complete homework? Vatterott advises schools to offer lots of opportunities for parent feedback on the quantity and quality of homework. For example:

- Ask parents to complete a homework card documenting how much time their child spent on homework for one week.
- Include a learning purpose on new homework.
- Provide a cover sheet for parents to write comments about homework to the teacher.
- For large projects, ask students to bring home a grading rubric, have intermittent dates for completing portions of the project, and complete a self-assessment of what they learned.

Action Teams can lead the charge on establishing homework guidelines that improve student learning and are fair and respectful of all families.

# Congrats to Casey!

by Betsy Prueter and Penny Bruskin

The DPI VISTA project sends warm wishes and good luck to outgoing VISTA Leader, Casey Gauthier. We thank her for her two years of service, her leadership, her enthusiasm, and her commitment to family partnerships! Casey has helped build the capacity of our project in so many ways, and her energy and positive attitude will be missed.

In Casey's two years of service she has created numerous outreach materials for our project, including our first ever project brochures. Casey worked hard to recruit all of YOU, and promote our position openings throughout the state and country. Additionally, our newsletter was taken to new heights with Casey at the helm.

And of course, most of all, Casey is a wonderful resource for all VISTAs- always willing to share resources, provide support, and listen to the needs of the corps. This said, we want to take a moment to highlight one example of how Casey has shown her commitment to the project in addition to being a thoughtful and supportive member of our team!

This past fall, a number of new VISTAs initiated their year of service by moving to new cities and communities. While our project tries to work with sites to really welcome new VISTAs to the community, Casey wanted to do something extra special. She suggested giving VISTAs welcoming gifts as a way of showing them how much we appreciate their commitment to our project.

As a fellow VISTA and a VISTA Leader, Casey's thoughtfulness and positivity was constant in all that she did. We will miss working with her here at DPI and we wish her all the best of luck!

*"It is not enough to take steps which may some day lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise."*

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*



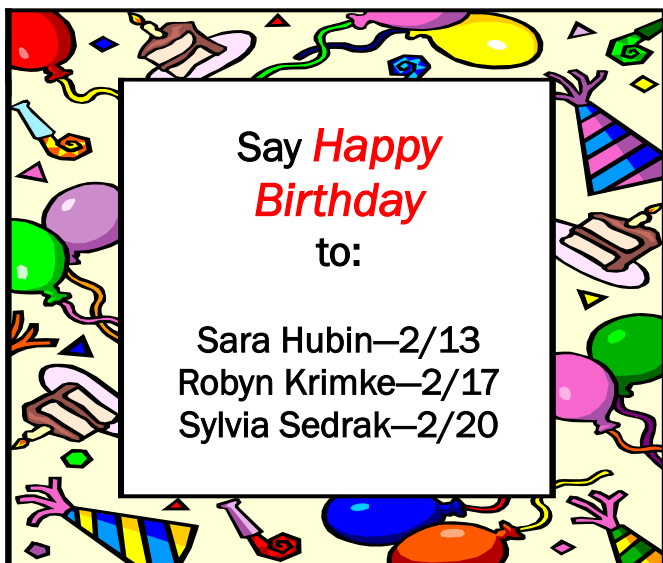
## Erica's Corner

by Erica Spurgeon

The start of February can often times be very stressful for VISTAs. Many of us are to our half way mark, most of us are trying to figure out how to recover from Christmas shopping on our small stipend, and we are probably sick of winter. While most of us wish we could de-stress with a massage or even a trip to a tropical island, we quickly remember that it can be financially hard to do so. To help everyone out, I've compiled a list of three major things we can do to de-stress:

1. **Exercise.** This doesn't mean we have to sign up for a gym membership or do anything hard-core. Doing sit-ups or push-ups in your living room or going for a walk can be good enough. Also, there are plenty of workout tapes and DVDs that you can get for really cheap on Amazon.com or at Wal-Mart and you can use them over and over again. Right now, my favorite workout video is a VHS of Susan Powter. I can exercise, and my roommate gets free entertainment from watching me. Since many of us work at sites in schools or around schools, getting a group of people together to play basketball, do cardio exercises, or even use the school's sledding hills is fun and free!
2. **Meditate and pamper.** Meditating is a great way to de-stress and you can do it anywhere! Putting on soothing music, doing breathing exercises or yoga poses, bubble baths, or simply rolling your shoulders all count. Giving yourself a manicure, pedicure, or hair or face mask is a great way to pamper yourself for cheap and you look great afterwards. If you really need a massage (and who doesn't?) and you're short on cash, look for salon deals in the paper or locate a college that trains in massage. Their prices are normally cheaper and the massage is just as good.
3. **Socialize.** This one is my favorite because it is always free. Invite some friends over to your house to talk and play games. Board games are a great investment because you can use them over and over again. If you're a big movie watcher, subscribe to Netflix. You can get unlimited movies every month for extremely low prices and, with all the selections, you're bound to find one you and your friends like.

Remember the best things in life are free...or at least cheap!



## Recipe of the Month: French Crepes

By Tracy Steffens

### Ingredients:

1 cup all-purpose flour  
2 eggs  
1/2 cup milk  
1/2 cup water  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons butter, melted

1. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour and the eggs. Gradually add in the milk and water, stirring to combine. Add the salt and butter; beat until smooth.
2. Heat a lightly oiled griddle or frying pan over medium high heat. Pour or scoop the batter onto the griddle, using approximately 1/4 cup for each crepe. Tilt the pan with a circular motion so that the batter coats the surface evenly.
3. Cook the crepe for about 2 minutes, until the bottom is light brown. Loosen with a spatula, turn and cook the other side. Serve hot.

### What Tracy suggests:

"The thing I really like about crepes is that they can be savory by adding ham, eggs, and cheese, or sweet with fruit, whipped cream, or adding a teaspoon of vanilla to the mix."



## "Hey! That's a good idea!"

**Stephanie Dorman**, VISTA with the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, has been making sure to send Action Team meeting minutes and other important information to PTA members and all interested parents who are able to attend meetings regularly. By doing this, she hopes that the parents will still provide feedback and volunteer to help out when they have time.

### DECISION MAKING

**Angela Rumsey**, VISTA with Parents Plus, compiled feedback given during Parent Professional Development training. She is planning to use this information to help parents obtain information on specific topics that they want to learn more about to help their children.

### PARENTING

**Robyn Krimke**, VISTA at U.S. Grant Elementary

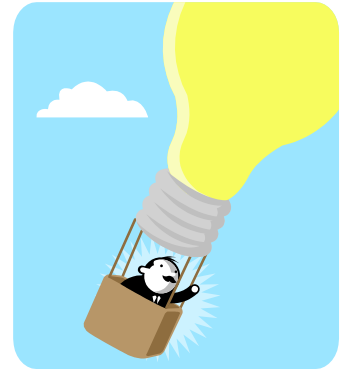
School, organized a Family Cook-Off, requiring families to submit a recipe along with the dish that was created together as a family. The families are able to practice reading and math skills while creating a delicious dish.

### LEARNING AT HOME

**Sara Byrnes**, VISTA at the Fond du Lac Public Library, is finishing up curriculum for a Facebook class the library plans to offer in the spring. This class was developed based on needs and interest expressed by community members, and Sara is training library staff to facilitate the class.

### EDUCATION

**Jim Handorf**, VISTA at the Madison Public Library, worked with staff members to launch a Volunteers in Tax Assistance program; a collaboration project between the Department of Revenue, the library,



and Edgewood College's accounting program. This program will be offered seven times during tax season.

### FINANCIAL PLANNING

**Lizzy Lowrey**, VISTA at Racine Public Library, has connected with local professional organizations including Young Professionals of Racine, Leadership Racine and Society of Human Resource Managers, in order to recruit more volunteers to staff the Job Lab! These informal networks are great resources to develop volunteer pools.

### EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SKILLS TRAINING

## VISTAs in the News



### Anna Morgan, School District of Rhinelander

Organized a two-week long book drive in four elementary schools and recruited two elementary classes to build bookshelves. The books and bookshelves were donated to the Northwoods Alliance for Temporary Housing, a local non-profit working to open a homeless shelter in Rhinelander this year.

<http://titancast.titantv.com/p/wjfw/s/MLK-Day-of-Service/1ACA1MW6.aspx>

### Kristine Nadolski, Wausau School District, and Sylvia Se-drak, Wausau Early Childhood Program

Participated in a Peace Walk and forum with members of the Wausau AmeriCorps Team.

[http://www.waow.com/global/video/popup/pop\\_playerLaunch.asp?vt1=v&clipFormat=flv&clipId1=4468571&at1=News&h1=Celebrating MLK Day&flvUri=&partnerclipid=](http://www.waow.com/global/video/popup/pop_playerLaunch.asp?vt1=v&clipFormat=flv&clipId1=4468571&at1=News&h1=Celebrating MLK Day&flvUri=&partnerclipid=)



# Parting Words

By Casey Gauthier



**Ellen Carpenter is serving with the Madison Metropolitan School District**

**Casey:** What would your perfect weekend consist of?

**Ellen:** First, it would consist of a feeling of accomplishment after finishing up a very productive and effective week of work because, without that feeling, the relaxing part just isn't much good. After that would be a spa visit and massage and a delicious dinner with close friends or family. On Saturday, I would play a game of ultimate Frisbee, go on a good mountain bike (or horseback) ride in the sun, and then spend a night out with pals, either salsa or swing dancing, and exploring the hot spots of Madison's night life. On Sunday, I would spend a few hours volunteering with Savory Sunday, running errands, cleaning and writing my week's to-do list, then curling up with a good book and furry friends.

**Casey:** If you had to live off of one meal for a year, what would you pick and why?

**Ellen:** I would pick a salad consisting of spinach, various lettuces, carrots, artichokes, bell pepper, cherry tomatoes, feta cheese, cilantro, garlic grilled chicken, sunflower seeds, dressing made of lime, olive oil, chipotle peppers. I would also have a side of jalapeño cheddar bread and a strawberry banana smoothie for dessert. It would be delicious and nutritious.

**Casey:** What's your greatest fear?

As I wrap up my second year with this Project, I am prompted to look back at my experience with a sense of accomplishment and wonder. I feel as though quite a bit

has been accomplished in this time, but I also wonder what the future will hold. If I return in five or ten years, will things I put into motion still be there? Will they have sustained?

Sustainability is an important piece of VISTA service; and something to keep at the forefront of your mind. Since a site can only apply for and receive the VISTA grant for up to three years, the importance sustainability is obvious. Three years can go by quicker than one can imagine.

My first year of service, beginning in February 2008, was exciting but a little daunting. Moving to a new town with no familiar faces didn't make the beginning easy, but everyone I came in contact with was thrilled with and supportive of the work I was doing. I soon came to feel like part of the community, even running into parents and staff members at Wal-Mart. Sadly, the year went by much too quickly.

Being given the opportunity to serve as a VISTA Leader in my second year, but to remain in Rhinelander, was just what I needed. I was thrilled to stay in the Northwoods, where I had so recently established connections with the people around me.

During the past two years, I have set in motion a number of things that I hope will become sustainable. Two of those things are Summer Storytime in the Park, a program of summertime reading in local parks for a half hour, and Computers from the Heart, a program of reformatting computers and giving them to families without that technological luxury.

Summer Storytime in the Park has taken place the past two summers and it looks as though year three is well on its way. I believe Storytime actually has a fairly easy path to sustainability. It's free, takes place outdoors, and is about nothing more than books and family and togetherness. Plus, it's easy to get attendees; all I've needed to do is walk around the playground and let parents and kids know. Storytime has cleared off swing sets and monkey bars in record time. Volunteers have been abundant, because who doesn't like getting outside of the office on a warm summer day?

Computers from the Heart is on its way to smooth running for a second year. The school district regularly weeds out older, but still working, computers from buildings. There's always a need for computers to get into the hands of Rhinelander families, and apparently there's always somebody willing to make those computers ready for those families. This year, it's an IT professor at the local college. He's willing to possibly integrate the project into his spring semester repair class every year to give students extra credit. This program also costs nothing, but the feeling and knowledge of giving somebody something that they couldn't afford is absolutely priceless. Three families benefited from this program last year and, this year, it looks as though eight families will be able to enjoy computer access in their homes before the end of the semester.

Personally, I have acquired and developed more skills than I thought possible. I have added to my writing portfolio, developed lifelong relationships, and grown in heart and mind; there's no going back.

As hard as it is to not know the future and to not know if these things and others will be around in years to come, I am aware that I have done my best and done all that I could have.

To all the VISTAs reading this, remember that your year is short and it's impossible to get everything done. But don't forget to hold tight to the little things that are evidence of something much bigger to come. Remember to never lose that passion for what you are doing. That passion gets you through the rough days and shows plainly in your actions and words with everyone you come in contact with.

Good luck and farewell!!



## VISTA to VISTA with Ellen Carpenter and Casey Bruns

**Ellen:** My greatest fear is that fear itself will overcome me... and wolf spiders.

**Casey:** What is something interesting about yourself that one wouldn't know just by looking at you?

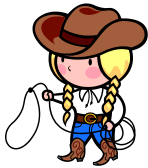
**Ellen:** I enjoy punk and ska music.

**Casey:** Why did you decide to join AmeriCorps?

**Ellen:** I joined for the invaluable public/non-profit work experience and to move to Madison.

**Casey:** What did you want to be when you were younger and how did that transition into what you want to be now?

**Ellen:** I wanted to be a cowgirl, not a princess. I was a pretty adventurous kid with a sense of self-righteousness and feminism before I knew the terms. I loved building forts and charting out every foot of our 180 acre plot. I still love exploring new landscapes and communities. I love the outdoors and I love helping others. I'm not quite sure what I want to "be" but I know that I want my life to continue to be a positive, productive adventure. I want to explore, learn and serve to alleviate social injustice in whatever I do.



**Casey:** If I were to listen to your iPod or rummage through your CDs, what kind of music would I find?

**Ellen:** Jack Johnson, Catch 22, Dispatch, Beck, Against Me!, Blues Traveler, Tracy Chapman, Dave Matthews Band, Spoon, Coheed and Cambria, AFI, The Clash, and Bob Marley.

**Casey:** If you could fly anywhere tomorrow where would it be, and who would you bring?

**Ellen:** I would go to any warm and sunny beach. I'll bring any of

my hardworking upper Midwestern friends (and fellow VISTAs) who would like a warm, relaxing retreat for the weekend.

**Casey:** If I were to look at your web browser, what site would show up most often in your history?

**Ellen:** Gmail.

**Casey:** What's your favorite TV show and why?

**Ellen:** Lately, I've been watching "Community," which is just a really funny, brief escape.



**Casey Burns is serving with Milwaukee Public Schools and Parents Plus, Inc.**

**Ellen:** If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?

**Casey:** I would be a chimp. I think they're cute; thus, I would be cute. I would also love to swing through the jungle and whatever else it is that they do.

**Ellen:** Where is your favorite place on Earth?

**Casey:** That's a tough one. As of right now, my favorite place on earth would be Berlin, Germany. I went there a few summers ago as part of my Political Science study abroad trip and it was by far my favorite city. I loved the people, the food, the laws, the culture, and the historical significance.

**Ellen:** If money was not an issue, what would you do with your life?

**Casey:** If money wasn't an issue, I'd travel the world and volunteer at local non-profits. In

my free time, I'd attend concerts and learn to play instruments native to the place I am visiting.

**Ellen:** What are your plans after your term of service?

**Casey:** My first order of business would be moving out of Wisconsin and heading West, even though that was actually my first order of business after graduating, and look where I am. I'm leaning towards Portland and, after a while, I plan to go back to school to get my Master's degree. The only problem is that I'm not sure what I would like to study. I'm considering Social Work, Psychology, Public Administration or Sociology.



**Ellen:** If you could be the best in the world at something, what would it be and why?

**Casey:** That's easy; I would be a musician. I want to be able to pick up an instrument and be able to play it well within a short amount of time. I'd want to compose beautiful music, amaze people with my improvisation and be able to play any song by ear. I've always been in love with music so, to be the world's best musician, would be a dream come true.

**Ellen:** Would you rather eat a bowl of worms or take a bath in lard?

**Casey:** I'd have to go with take a bath in lard. I'm a very picky eater and I would feel really bad taking the lives of worms. Also, there are always showers.

**Ellen:** What is one of your favorite quotes?

**Casey:** "The man who, in a fit of melancholy, kills himself today, would have wished to live had he waited a week," by

Voltaire.

**Ellen:** If you had one million dollars to donate to any cause, organization or project of your choice, where would you donate it?

**Casey:** That is tough; there are a lot of non-profits that I love: The Trevor Project, Special Olympics, ACLU, Invisible Children, HRC, etc. However, I would have to go with To Write Love On Her Arms. For anyone who doesn't know, TWLOHA deals with addiction, depression, self-injury and suicide. They work to inform and provide help; they have been amazing at getting their message out through social media sites, speaking engagements and music concerts. TWLOHA deals with causes that have affected my life in many ways, so I would pick that project so that people know that there's hope; they no longer have to deal with the stigma of these issues and can seek help.

**Ellen:** What is one of your fondest memories from childhood?

**Casey:** My fondest memory is camping in Door County. My family camped a lot when I was younger and we had a close group of family friends we'd go with. Peninsula State Park was always my favorite campground; I loved to swim, hike, carve sticks, play with fire and, of course, eat. One of the family friends we went with was like my second mother to me, but she died when I was in third grade and it wasn't the same after that.

**Ellen:** If you could time travel, when and where would you go and what would you do?

**Casey:** I would travel back in time to August 15, 1969 in Bethel, New York in the middle of empty farmland to attend a little shindig known as Woodstock. I would be in hippie bliss.

## Grant Opportunities

### Fiskars: Project Orange Thumb

Fiskars Project Orange Thumb grants Fiskars garden tools and materials such as plants, seeds, mulch, etc. to eligible gardening groups. Maximum award: \$1,000 in implements and materials. Eligibility: gardens and/or gardening projects geared toward community involvement, neighborhood beautification, horticultural education, and/or sustainable agriculture.

Deadline: February 19, 2010.

[http://www.fiskars.com/content/garden\\_en\\_us/Garden/ProjectOrangeThumb/grantprogram](http://www.fiskars.com/content/garden_en_us/Garden/ProjectOrangeThumb/grantprogram)

### National Summer Learning Association: Excellence in Summer Learning

The Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes an outstanding summer program that accelerates academic achievement and promotes positive development for young people. Maximum award: national recognition, increased press opportunities, conference presentations, and complimentary registrations, professional development opportunities for staff, and increased publishing opportunities. Eligibility: public or private organizations or agencies (schools, community-based organizations, libraries, universities, faith-based organizations, etc.) serving young people between the ages of kindergarten and 12th grade over the summer months.

Deadline: February 24, 2010.

[http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=excellence\\_summer](http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=excellence_summer)

### Sodexo: STOP Hunger Scholarship

The Sodexo STOP Hunger Scholarship program supports the education of young people working to end hunger in communities across the United States, and brings attention to the innovative and effective solutions they are implementing toward ending hunger in their lifetime. Maximum award: a \$5,000 scholarship award and a matching \$5,000 grant in their name for the hunger-related charity of their choice. Eligibility: students enrolled in an accredited education institution (kindergarten through graduate school) in the United States who can demonstrate an ongoing commitment to hunger-relief activities in their community.

Deadline: February 26, 2010.

[http://www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger\\_us/scholarships/scholarships.asp](http://www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger_us/scholarships/scholarships.asp)

### Caring Institute: 2010 Caring Awards

The Caring Institute is now accepting nominations for its annual Caring Awards. Nominees should exemplify caring and serve as worthy role models for others. Award criteria include length of service, scope and impact of work, challenges over-

come, and imagination and innovation. Maximum award: All winners are honored at a special ceremony, and young adult winners receive funds for college. Eligibility: individuals from nine to 99 years old.

Deadline: March 1, 2010.

<http://www.caring-institute.org/caringawards.html>

### Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes honors outstanding young leaders who have focused on helping their communities and fellow beings and/or on protecting the health and sustainability of the environment. Maximum award: \$2,500. Eligibility: youth 8-18.

Deadline: April 30, 2010.

<http://www.barronprize.org/>

### National Endowment for the Arts: Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth

The NEA Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth program funds projects that



help children and youth acquire appreciation, knowledge, and understanding of and skills in the arts. Projects must provide participatory learning and engagement of students with skilled artists, teachers, and excellent art, and ensure the application of national, state, or local arts education standards. Maximum award: \$150,000. Eligibility: school-based or community-based projects.

Deadline: June 10, 2010.

<http://www.arts.gov/grants/apply/GAP11/LITA.html>

*"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."*

**John Quincy Adams**